



# Great Basin Critical Incident Peer Support

## Agency Administrator's Briefing

### Critical Incidents

A critical incident is any unexpected, traumatic event that affects an individual's feelings of personal safety, their ability to perform daily activities, and their ability to concentrate on their normal job duties. Simply put, a critical incident is a traumatic event (or perceived life-threatening event) that has sufficient power to overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. Critical incidents may also occur outside of work and still impact a large number of employees.

### Benefits of Critical Incident Peer Support

Benefits of early intervention by both professional and peer-support personnel who are specially trained and follow established protocols of stress management which can promote positive recovery from traumatic stress. Experts believe that various techniques and processes used in Critical Incident Peer Support can help individuals improve their coping abilities and dramatically decrease the occurrence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), lower the tension and mitigate the group's reaction to a traumatic event.

First developed for use with military combat veterans and then civilian first responders (police, fire, ambulance, emergency workers and disaster rescuers), it has now been adapted and used virtually everywhere there is a need to address a traumatic impact in people's lives.

### What is Critical Incident Peer Support

Peer relationships are built around a mutual understanding, respect and trust. Shared experiences are the foundation for peer support as they foster the initial trust and credibility necessary for developing relationships in which individuals are willing to open up and discuss their problems despite concerns about stigma.

Peer Supporters have received training and certification as Critical Incident Peer Supporters. They are trained to listen, assess and refer when necessary to trained Mental Health Professionals. Peer Supporters should never be used as a replacement for the professional care or used outside of the scope they have been trained for.



CI Peer Support is not psychotherapy or counseling. It is not treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and it is not intended as a substitute for such. Neither is the CI Peer Support a critique nor an investigation of the traumatic event. It is also not a part of any problem-solving process for administrative problems.

## Timeline – Why it's Important

Critical Incident support is not an emergency however assistance should be ordered as soon as possible. CI support intervention processes generally start no sooner 48–72 hours after an incident. CI support services can also be provided within a few weeks or longer depending on the incident. It is important to allow time for affected individuals to disengage operationally, and re-connect with family or friends. Once this occurs individuals are typically emotionally ready to benefit from peer support.

## Who We Are

Since chartered by the Great Basin Coordinating Group in 2001, the Great Basin Peer Support Group has been providing assistance to Fire and Aviation personnel when serious accidents, injuries or death have occurred in the line of duty.

Since its inception, fire-related personnel (including, dispatchers, engines, smokejumpers, hotshot, aviation, fire management and others) have attended the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation's Individual & Group crisis intervention classes. They have responded to a variety of fire and aviation line of duty traumatic incidents and provided valuable support. The Great Basin's Critical Incident Peer Support Group is committed to peers helping peers and is available upon request. When needed, the group has access to mental health professionals; who can provide another level of support.

The Great Basin does not maintain "CISM Teams." CI Peer Support Groups are assembled at the time of request through the appropriate Great Basin Coordination Center and comprise of Peer and Group Supporters with similar backgrounds and experience as those involved in a critical incident.



..I was almost certain the crew felt comfortable with these guys. They looked like hotshots, acted like hotshots because they were hotshots...

## What We Do

- Great Basin Critical Incident Peer Support Groups provide the following:
- Situation assessment for managers to help determine the timing and type of support needed for each incident.
- A Peer Support Group to provide crisis management services with access to mental health care professionals who specialize in trauma.
- Request assistance from a Human Resource Specialist to provide information regarding local resources that provide follow up support.
- Support Incident Management Teams, militia and non-fire support personnel affected by an incident.
- Provide peers supporters who can travel to the fire line, spike camp and other remote locations.



Great Basin Critical Incident Peer Supporters are trained and certified by the International Critical Incident Foundation.

## Agency Administrator Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Identification of Event:** The Agency Administrator is responsible for identifying a critical event as a critical incident. The Agency Administrator is the highest ranking agency line officer with direct responsibility for the personnel involved in the incident.

2. **Request Critical Incident Peer Support:** The Agency Administrator or designee is responsible for requesting Critical Incident Peer Support through the appropriate Great Basin Coordination Center (GACC). A Critical Incident Peer Support Coordinator will be assigned who will work with the Agency Administrator and designated Peer Group Leader to decide the size and make-up of the group.

Generally, a Liaison will travel as soon as possible to the unit affected to gather facts, determine timelines and make an assessment of the individuals and groups that have been impacted. The Liaison will be a member of the Peer Group that's been assigned.

3. **Manage Information about the Critical Incident:** Acknowledge to employees that the critical incident has occurred. By providing factual information to your employees, you can help prevent rumors from spreading. Provide a consistent message to all groups. Address any rumors that may be circulating, or concerns employees may voice.



4. **Support Employees:** Remember that that traumatized employees need structure, facts, peer support, and instructions on what to expect next. Find out what employees are planning to do with their time once they leave work and provide accountability partners. Encourage them to spend time with friends or family members. Coordinate with fire and aviation staff to identify the employees most affected by the traumatic event and offer them a quiet place to be, but don't force them to be isolated if they'd prefer to stay with their co-workers.

5. **Provide Information:** The Agency Administrator or designee is responsible for providing the Critical Incident Support Coordinator with information about the incident. The Agency Administrator is responsible for providing a budget code for expenses associated with Peer Group response (and Mental Health Professional, if applicable). The Peer Support Group Coordinator will assist in determining a location for facility for CI meetings.

The Agency Administrator or designee will make time to receive a briefing from the Critical Incident Support Coordinator or their Point of Contact.

The Agency Administrator or designee is also responsible for providing the CI Support Group with contact information for the EAP provider and/or other resources that may be available to provide support within their local area.

### Great Basin Coordination Centers

Eastern Great Basin  
801-531-5320

Western Great Basin  
775-861-6455

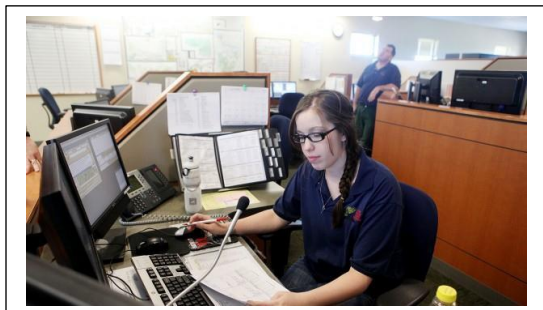
## Definitions

**Critical Incident Stress Management:** Commonly referred to as “CISM” is a comprehensive, phase sensitive, integrated, multi-component approach to crisis intervention. CISM is a coordinated program of tactics that are linked and blended together to alleviate the reactions to traumatic experiences.

**Catastrophic Incident:** Catastrophic incidents are those situations which have an extreme impact on numerous individuals or organizations. These incidents may draw significant media attention. The level of trauma to personnel, families and a community is substantial.

**Critical Incident Peer Support Program:** The Great Basin Critical Incident Peer Support Committee recruits peers, coordinates training sessions and workshops, and seeks out new clinicians, research and technology in trauma and crisis management to enhance the program.

**Critical Incident Peer Support Group:** A group of individuals consisting of fire and aviation personnel trained in various aspects of crisis intervention. The CI Peer Support Group usually consists of three or four peer group members and a group leader but depends on the incident, numbers of individuals and organizations affected, etc. In addition to peer supporters the group includes Mental Health Care Professionals who specialize in trauma and are familiar with the wildland fire community. The CI Peer Support Group is assembled by the Critical Incident Peer Support Group Coordinator when a request is received.



**Crisis Management Briefing (CMB):** This is a structured meeting designated to provide information about the incident, control rumors, educate about symptoms of distress, inform about basic stress management, and identify resources available for continued support if desired. The goals of a CMB include providing factual information, instill a sense of leadership, reduce chaos, and enhance credibility. The CMB is designed to assist those involved directly or indirectly with the incident and is not intended for the media.

**Defusing:** A three-step crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogenous group of people after an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. The purpose of a defusing is to mitigate the impact of the event, accelerate the recovery process, and assist the need for additional services.

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD):** Often provided as a seven-step crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogenous group of people after an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. It may be used as part of an integrated package of interventions within the Critical Incident Peer Support response.

For More Information Visit us at:

<http://gacc.nifc.gov/wgbc/GBCG/cismindex.htm>

or email:

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